THE
CATHOLIC RADICAL

"...to foster a society based on creed instead of greed." Peter Maurin

December/January 2015-16 ***Price: For whatever it's worth.***

Peace in the Holy Land

by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

On October 26 , 2015, in a service to mark the twentieth anniversary of the murder of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin by a Jewish extremist opposed to the peace process Rabin initiated, his daughter Dalia said, "I am not a bearer of good news today, there are no peace talks, and there is terror, and blood is spilling again ,and the impasse is growing, and I have no other country, and I don't recognize my country." OnOctonber 27, Richard Lakin, an Israeli whom *Newsweek* said "devoted his life to creating understanding between Arabs and Jews," was stabbed to death by a Palestinian. Lakin was the ninth Israeli killed by Palestinians in October.

The murder of Israelis like Rabin and Lakin fuel the conclusion many draw that coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians is impossible. Many Israelis believe that Palestinian violence stems from deep seated anti-Semitism stoked by Islamic leaders. Seeing Palestinian attacks as the latest chapter in the long history of Jewish suffering, these Israelis demand fierce reprisals.

In the late 1600s, after natives attacked women and children, colonial New Englanders rejected coexistence and initiated an all-out war against natives, whom they regarded as savages. Three centuries later, the surviving descendants of indigenous New Englanders are miniscule.

Is this the solution to conflict in the Holy Land? Does one people have to be eliminated? Is Palestinian ethnic cleansing the only option to assure Jewish safety?

Justin Watt

From Zionism's inception in the late 1800s, when Jews represented less than 5% of Palestine's population, Zionism's goal has been the creation of a Jewish state, just as the Pilgrims who landed on Plymouth Rock wanted to create a Christian state. Neither the Zionists nor Pilgrims factored how their goals would be experienced and resisted by indigenous people.

Since Israel's modern birth in 1948, Palestinians have been dispossessed, displaced, and disregarded. In a systematic way, they have been confined to an ever smaller portion of land, a process which actually accelerated under the "peace" plan of Prime Minister Rabin. Right wing Israeli governments have not been shy about using military force against Palestinians, while the left wing has preferred to advance the Zionist goals through discriminatory laws that favor Jewish immigration and squeeze Palestinians economically, socially, and politically.

Richard Lakin, an American Jew from Newton, Massachusetts, was able to move to Israel and claim citizenship, while Mubarak Awad, a Palestinian American peace activist, who was born in Jerusalem, was expelled from Israel and denied the right to even visit many times.

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Deja Vu All Over Again

Editor's Note: The following are addresses to the American people given by US Presidents. Thanks to the late-great baseball player Yogi Berra for the title.

Richard Nixon- November 3, 1969

Tonight I want to talk to you on a subject of deep concern to all Americans and to many people in all parts of the world — the war in Vietnam.

I believe that one of the reasons for the deep division about Vietnam is that many Americans have lost confidence in what their Government has told them about our policy....

Now, let me begin by describing the situation I found when I was inaugurated on January 20:

- The war had been going on for 4 years. 34,000 Americans had been killed in action.
- The training program for the South Vietnamese was behind schedule. 540,000 Americans were in Vietnam with no plans to reduce the number.
- No progress had been made at the negotiations in Paris and the United States had not put forth a comprehensive peace proposal.
- The war was causing deep division at home and criticism from many of our friends as well as our enemies abroad.

In view of these circumstances there were some who urged that I end the war at once by ordering the immediate withdrawal of all American forces.

From a political standpoint this would have been a popular and easy course to follow. After all, we became involved in the war while my predecessor was in

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Peace in the Holy Land

(Continued from Page 1)

It is hard to over-estimate the severity and relentless nature of the oppression that Palestinians have experienced both inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories: arrests without charge, torture, home demolitions, land seizures, travel restrictions, curfews, and lethal attacks by Jewish settlers, Israeli police and soldiers. A Palestinian farmer I know named Atta Jabbar had half his land seized, his wells poisoned, his crops destroyed, his vehicles set on fire, his irrigation pipes confiscated, his home marred by racist graffiti, and his two-year-old daughter nearly blinded by Jewish settlers who shattered windows while she and the rest of the family slept. No one was ever held accountable for these crimes.

In 1989, a highly educated Palestinian Christian woman whom I met in Beit Sahour, just outside Bethlehem, told an Israeli officer who led soldiers ransacking her house, "The Nazis taught you how to hate, and now you are teaching us." Despite the fact that she spoke Hebrew and had many Jewish friends, she was as subject to discrimination as any other Palestinian. She told me, "Every day that passes without justice, increases my temptation to embrace violence."

As Palestinian despair has mounted, so has the blind rage which led to Richard Lakin's murder. With nothing left to lose, Palestinians, like early Native Americans, are turning increasingly violent. Apostles of negotiations are dismissed as simpletons or collaborators.

But then in the midst of the rising tide of killing, several thousand Israelis marched in Tel Aviv to proclaim that the root cause of the violence was the Israeli occupation. For many, this meant the Israeli control and domination of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip, but, for some, it meant the entire Zionist enterprise. An increasing number of Israelis and Palestinians believe that the only road to peace is the recreation of Israel as a democratic state with full human rights for all its residents regardless of their religion or ethnicity, not a Jewish or a Palestinian state, but one both can equally claim as their home. Such a transformation will be a very bitter pill for those who favor domination, but, like South Africans under apartheid, the choice is either justice or endless death. Given the vast numerical majority of Palestinians, Jewish domination is a doomed enterprise, just as white rule was in South Africa. The time for Israeli Jews and their supporters to embrace a non-racist future in the Holy Land is very long overdue and essential if there is to be any hope of securing a peaceful future for all Jews, Muslims, and Christians who want to call the region home.

Such a dramatic change in Israeli policy will not come without very significant outside pressure. US military and economic aid must be made conditional on the promotion of equal rights for Palestinians. Individuals, businesses, and non-governmental organizations, need to embrace the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement. The international community needs to be clear that ethnic oppression is not acceptable anywhere.

As Pope Paul VI said, "If you want peace, work for justice." Ω

A New Birth of Freedom

by Felicity Currie

Can we create a Christ birth
that means care
Of being, human being, everywhere?
My life is your life, let me feel with you
Each thrust of torture and its mortal twist
Beyond, to loss and nothing. Let me be
A means of telling truth. It does exist:
Calling for meaning,
change and outcome too.
Knowing what I know, I am you - not me.

Can my being here, so far from your despair,
Have any chance of making this world care —
Reshape the attitude of all who keep
Injustice in their palaces of sleep?
Shall I say yes and let this day of sun
Transform dark into light for everyone?

Editor's Note: A sonnet composed in 2014 and dedicated to the Palestinians.

The Medicalization of Dissent

by Jeremy Kuzmarov & Jerry Lembcke

On June 30, 2009, Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl left his unit in Paktika Province in southeastern Afghanistan. Walking alone, he was soon captured by Taliban fighters, who held him prisoner for nearly five years.

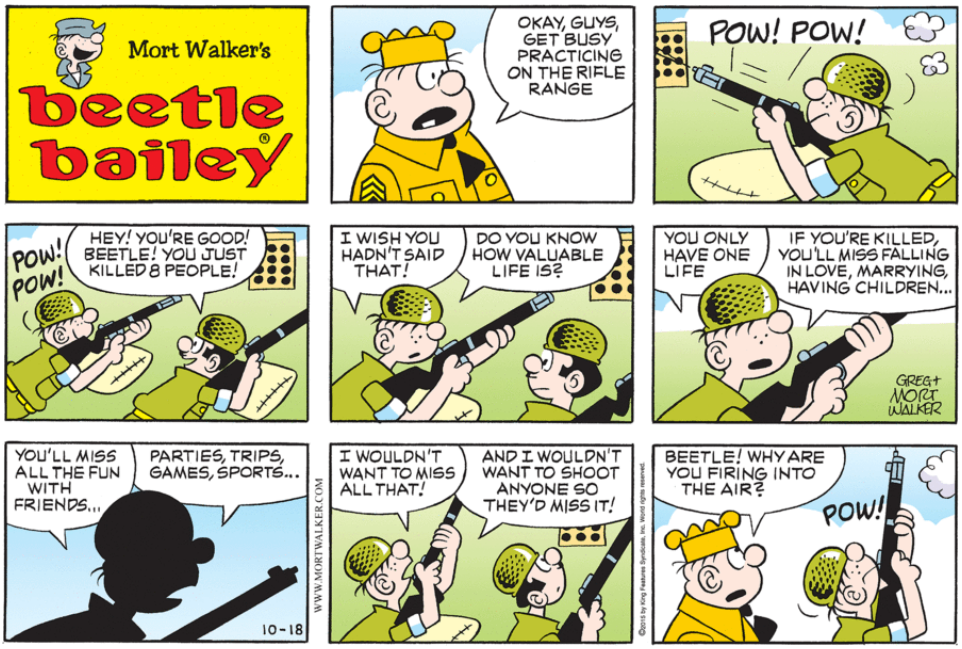
After his release as part of a prisoner exchange arranged by President Obama in May 2014, questions arose about Bergdahl's motivations for leaving, and his susceptibility to accusations of desertion and "misbehavior before the enemy," the latter a diluted charge of defection.

In recent proceedings comparable to a civilian grand jury, prosecutors alleged that members of Bergdahl's unit assigned to a seven-week search for their missing comrade were subjected to considerable discomfort and exposure to enemy attack. As a result, Bergdahl faces charges that could put him in prison for life.

Bergdahl said he walked away not to desert his unit or the army, but to seek a higher military authority to whom he could report the incompetence of his unit's leadership. It was an explanation consistent with the disgust for the war he expressed in letters to his parents prior to his disappearance, his shame for the US military's mistreatment of Afghan civilians, and his disrespect for the career military personnel — calling his battalion commander a "conceited old fool."

Left at that, it is unlikely Bergdahl will evade AWOL (Absent Without Leave) charges. But his guilt with respect to the more serious charges is open to interpretation. There is much in his views and actions that is characteristic of conscientious objection to war, the principle that for reasons of religious belief, individuals can claim exception from military combat.

Bergdahl was homeschooled in a counterculture environment that valued individual thinking and personal responsibility, traits he displayed in Afghanistan. Indeed, in a text to his father just a day before leaving his unit, Bergdahl expressed horror at what he was seeing, to which his father replied:


Mort Walker's
beetle bailey
OKAY, GUYS, GET BUSY PRACTICING ON THE RIFLE RANGE
POW! POW!
POW! POW!
HEY! YOU'RE GOOD! BEETLE! YOU JUST KILLED 8 PEOPLE!
I WISH YOU HADN'T SAID THAT!
DO YOU KNOW HOW VALUABLE LIFE IS?
YOU ONLY HAVE ONE LIFE
IF YOU'RE KILLED, YOU'LL MISS FALLING IN LOVE, MARRYING, HAVING CHILDREN...
GREG+ MORT WALKER
YOU'LL MISS ALL THE FUN WITH FRIENDS...
PARTIES, TRIPS, GAMES, SPORTS...
10-18
WWW.MORTWALKER.COM
I WOULDN'T WANT TO MISS ALL THAT!
AND I WOULDN'T WANT TO SHOOT ANYONE SO THEY'D MISS IT!
BEETLE! WHY ARE YOU FIRING INTO THE AIR?
POW!

Dear Bowe,

In matters of life and death, and especially at war, it is never safe to ignore one's conscience. Ethics demands obedience to our conscience. It is best to also have a systematic oral defense of what our conscience demands. Stand with like minded men when possible.

A defense of Bergdahl framed within the discourse of conscientious objection would enable him, his family, and the antiwar movement to put the war on trial and with it the political and military leaders responsible. The potential is there, in other words, for a classic table-turning legal strategy that puts the prosecutorial parties on the defense.

Bergdahl's behavior appears to be quite rational in the context of a horrific war. His parents told *Rolling Stone* journalist Matthew Hastings that he had gone overseas "to help Afghan villagers rebuild their lives and learn to defend themselves." In a later email to his parents, he said:

> *These people [the Afghans] need help, [but] what they get is the most conceited country in the world telling them that they are nothing and that they are stupid . . . we make fun of them in front of their faces* and laugh at them for not understanding that we are insulting them.

Unfortunately, Bergdahl's lawyer appears to be shunning the conscientious objector defense, focusing instead on the soldier's mental health. His attorney, Lt. Col. Franklin D. Rosenblatt, argued last month that Bergdahl suffered "a severe mental disease or defect" at the time of his offense in Afghanistan.

The fine lines separating "bad" and "mad," "criminal" and "crazy" fill volumes in the studies of criminology and mental health practice. And there's a long history of using them to depoliticize antiwar activism.

In the closing years of the war in Vietnam, thousands of veterans returned and joined the antiwar movement. Pro-war pundits dismissed them as malcontents, political subversives, and the drug-addled offspring of an antiwar counterculture.

Liberal observers, meanwhile, tended to see veterans as victims of an unfair draft system and the brutalities of war and military authoritarianism. But the victim-veteran narrative was easily coopted by the media, politicians, Hollywood filmmakers,

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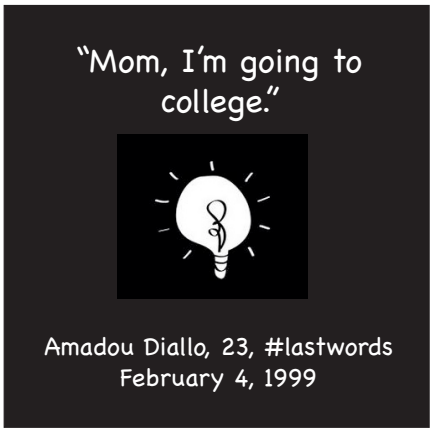
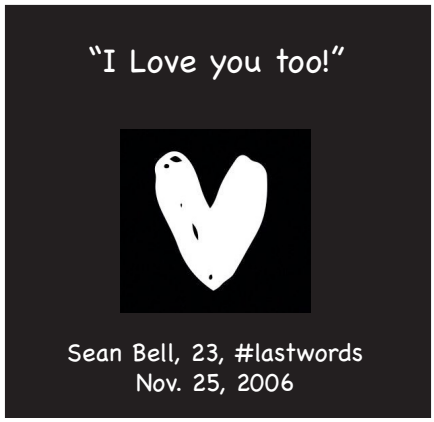
#Last Words

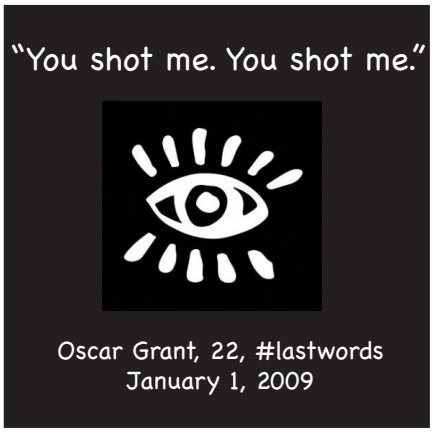
by Shirin Barghi



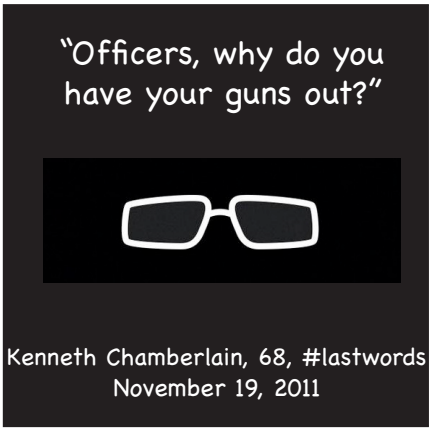
An unarmed black man, whose porch light was out, shot to death by NY police after reaching for his wallet.



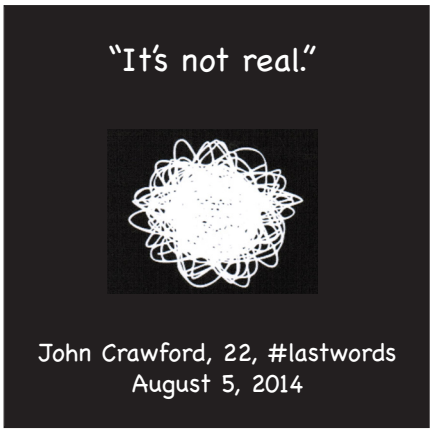
An unarmed black man, on the eve of his wedding, shot to death by four New York City police officers as he drove away from his bachelor party with his buddies.



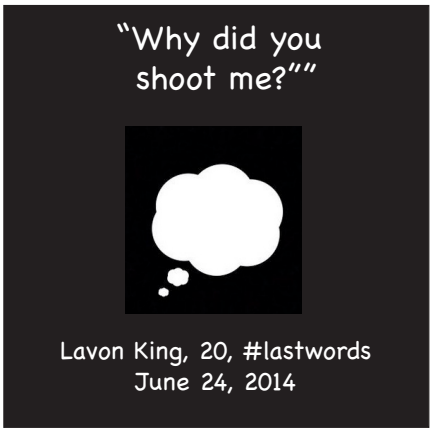
An unarmed black man, lying face down and handcuffed, fatally shot by police at the Fruitvale BART Station in Oakland, CA.



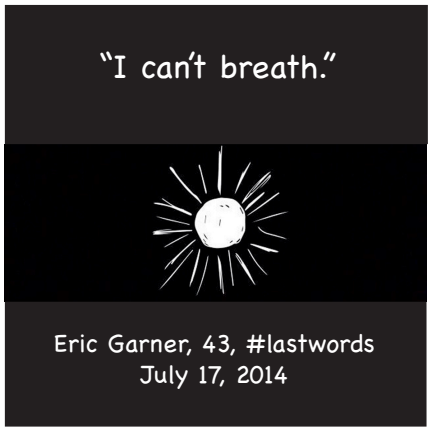
An unarmed black man in White Plains, NY, whose medical alert necklace was inadvertently triggered, had his front door broken down by police who tasered and then shot him to death.



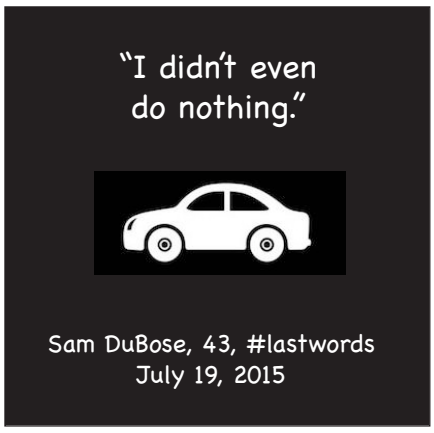
A black man shot to death by police in Dayton, Ohio after picking up an unpackaged and unloaded BB/pellet air rifle inside a store's sporting goods section and continuing to shop.



An unarmed black man, with arrest warrants for drugs and theft, was shot to death after a struggle with a Jersey City police officer.



An unarmed black man put in a chokehold by NY police on suspicion of selling single cigarettes from packs without tax stamps.



An unarmed black man shot to death following a calm exchange during a traffic stop in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Deja Vu

(Continued from Page 1)

office. I could blame the defeat which would be the result of my action on him and come out as the peacemaker. ...But I had a greater obligation than to think only of the years of my administration and of the next election. I had to think of the effect of my decision on the next generation and on the future of peace and freedom in America and in the world....

Why and how did the United States become involved in Vietnam in the first place? Fifteen years ago North Vietnam, with the logistical support of Communist China and the Soviet Union, launched a campaign to impose a Communist government on South Vietnam by instigating and supporting a revolution.

In response to the request of the Government of South Vietnam, President Eisenhower sent economic aid and military equipment to assist the people of South Vietnam in their efforts to prevent a Communist takeover. Seven years ago, President Kennedy sent 16,000 military personnel to Vietnam as combat advisers. Four years ago, President Johnson sent American combat forces to South Vietnam.

Now, many believe that President Johnson's decision to send American combat forces to South Vietnam was wrong. And many others—I among them — have been strongly critical of the way the war has been conducted.

But the question facing us today is: Now that we are in the war, what is the best way to end it?

In January, I could only conclude that the precipitate withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam would be a disaster not only for South Vietnam but for the United States and for the cause of peace....

For the United States, this first defeat in our Nation's history would result in a collapse of confidence in American leadership, not only in Asia but throughout the world.... For the future of peace, precipitate withdrawal would thus be a disaster of immense magnitude....

Ultimately, this would cost more lives....Ω

Barack Obama- October 15, 2015

Last December — more than 13 years after our nation was attacked by al Qaeda on 9/11 — America's combat mission in Afghanistan came to a responsible end. That milestone was achieved thanks to the courage and the skill of our military, our intelligence, and civilian personnel. They served there with extraordinary skill and valor, and it's worth remembering especially the more than 2,200 American patriots who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan....

Our troops trained Afghan forces so they could take the lead for their own security and protect Afghans as they voted in historic elections, leading to the first democratic transfer of power in their country's history....

But as I've said before, while America's combat mission in Afghanistan may be over, our commitment to Afghanistan and its people endures. As Commander-in-Chief, I will not allow Afghanistan to be used as safe haven for terrorists to attack our nation again. Our forces therefore remain engaged in two narrow but critical missions — training Afghan forces, and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda. Of course, compared to the 100,000 troops we once had in Afghanistan, today fewer than 10,000 remain, in support of these very focused missions.

... Today, I want to update the American people on our efforts.

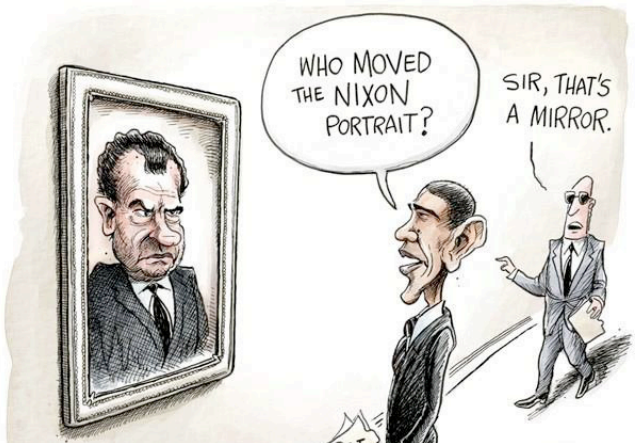
Since taking the lead for security earlier this year, Afghan forces have continued to step up. ... This has come at a very heavy price. This year alone, thousands of Afghan troops and police have lost their lives, as have many Afghan civilians.

At the same time, Afghan forces are still not as strong as they need to be. ... The bottom line is, in key areas of the country, the security situation is still very fragile, and in some places there is risk of deterioration.

...I'm therefore announcing the following steps, which I am convinced offer the best possibility for lasting progress in Afghanistan.

First, I've decided to maintain our current posture of 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through most of next year ...

Second, I have decided that instead of going down to a normal embassy presence in Kabul by the end of 2016, we will maintain 5,500 troops at a small number of bases, including at Bagram, Jalalabad in the east, and Kandahar in the south...



Adam Zyglis

...And finally, because governance and development remain the foundation for stability and progress in Afghanistan, we will continue to support President Ghani and the national unity government as they pursue critical reforms. ...As I told President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah yesterday, efforts that deliver progress and justice for the Afghan people will continue to have the strong support of the United States....

My fellow Americans, after so many years of war, Afghanistan will not be a perfect place. It's a poor country that will have to work hard on its development. There will continue to be contested areas. But Afghans like these are standing up for their country. If they were to fail, it would endanger the security of us all....Ω

Editor's Note: In the six years after Nixon's speech, 20,000 additional Americans and over a million Southeast Asians were killed. Two weeks after Obama's address, he announced the deployment of military advisers to Syria, and Congress approved a forty billion dollar increase in military spending.

Medicalization of Dissent

(Continued from Page 3)

and the medical establishment to construct the image of wigged-out, trauma-stricken veterans whose dissent was viewed, though sympathetically, as more of a symptom than a political statement.

With the legitimation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a war-related mental illness in 1980, the memory of GIs and veterans empowered and politicized by their wartime experience was eventually displaced by that of veterans coming home as damaged goods.

Francois Robert

The medicalization of dissent became a staple in the literature on the history of politics and psychiatry during the 1980s and 1990s, and it returned to clinical practice in 2003 when troops were deployed to Iraq. With public opposition mounting and antiwar demonstrations growing, the press and mental health professionals preemptively put the war-trauma narrative into play, asserting that our fighters would be returning symptomatic — and with that collective diagnosis, service personnel objecting on political or moral grounds were easily ignored.

It is against this backdrop which the Bergdahl affair has to be considered. While the merit of his mental health defense is difficult to assess from the outside, the approach is emblematic of America's tendency to pathologize veteran dissent against ill-conceived wars of aggression. Instead of their dissent spurring public reconsideration of existing policy, the defendants' lawyers play off public sympathy for the psychological traumas that veterans often suffer.

Today, the mainstream media continues to spotlight cases in which soldiers commit crimes or struggle with physical or psychological issues. When covering cases like Bergdahl's, veterans' actions are rarely framed as legitimate forms of dissent. *The New York Times* report on the defense's "mental illness strategy," for example, does not explore the reasons Bergdahl left his unit or engage with the content of his emails to his parents, which might have shed a different light on the case.

Still, none of this occurs in a vacuum. If there was a large antiwar movement, Bergdahl's lawyer could have perhaps pursued a more political course, taken the case to trial, and used the court as an antiwar platform. Absent that environment, the defense might have had little choice but to argue that it was mental illness — not unshakeable principle — that drove Bergdahl to abandon his unit. Ω

Editor's Note: Jeremy Kuzmarov is the author of The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs. *Jerry Lembcke is the author of* PTSD: Diagnosis and Identity in Post-Empire America *and* The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory and the Legacy of Vietnam. *This article first appeared in the 10/16/15 issue of* Jacobin *magazine. It is reprinted with the authors' permission.*

Letters

Anthony Russo

Hi All,

Can we talk now? He's gone. Out the door. He waved from inside the plane.

I can breathe again. He escaped without being shot by some crazed American, spurred on by that posse of haters now running for president.

When Dorothy [Day] visited Chrystie Street, we rejoiced at her presence, but, knowing the unpredictable was the norm, we dreaded what might happen, what could come through the door. Not the house people or regulars, as eccentric and surprising as they were, but the overflow, the crazed from Bowery bars, out of their minds, eager to share their pain.

I remember trying unsuccessfully to talk a wild man out the door, as he pushed and shoved me back, when Mad Paul, from his place among the garbage cans, in the small yard behind the kitchen, came at us, like a lion tamer, with a chair upraised, its four legs aimed at us, brushed me aside, and, with curses and threats, forced the man out the door. Not my finest hour. The wild man, hours later, came back and apologized.

Dorothy was not there to see it, but I never saw her fearful, nor was Pope Francis.

But I was on the edge of my seat for a week. And conflicted about the police state security that enveloped him. My eyes were assaulted by it, for it was a rebuke and a denial of his message; yet, I hoped they could prevent any attack on a most vulnerable, white-robed target.

But what Security could not prevent was Francis' elevating Dorothy to the high altar of the American experience. Naming her and Merton, MLK, and Lincoln in the same breath is a glorious rereading of American history, an upending of our prevailing myths. For the "dots and iotas" of Leon Bloy's immense liturgical text, which is history, have had their importance declared finally, their champions exalted.

No matter that the altar, in this case, is a battered, tin-topped, gaudily painted, yet sturdy and unmoving soup table.

Jack Cook
Endwell, New York

Claire,

I'm in my study, and find that I have **Letters from Westerbork** on my bookshelf. I thought it was in NY at our farmhouse. Anyhow, I'm going to stick it in the mail and get it off to you on loan. No rush to get it back as I have the large volume, found at a garage sale, that contains all Etty Hillesum's writings. I will also include a compilation of quotes and a flier on the one-woman play written from the journal writings of Etty by my friend Susan Stein.

After talking with Martha Hennessey about "Etty" on Saturday, it looks as though Susan, who lives in NYC, will be able to perform at the NY Catholic Worker at some time in the future. I have loved finding venues for the play as Etty Hillesum is close to my heart—as is Susan.

I read your articles in the latest *Catholic Radical*. Your writing always reaches deep as you manage to meld events with your interior, personal "musings" — the perfect word! I, too, rejoice that you were spared injury or death in the close call with the branch of your maple tree. Clearly, your friends in the neighborhood feel exactly the same. Your "Musings" reminded me of the homeless woman who lived with us on two different occasions for a total of 1 1/2 years. Donna was a sweet, probably paranoid woman, who was a daily Mass goer, loved helping around the house, and except for strange behavior - like cutting up her clothes from the local thrift shop after she'd worn them a short time — not difficult. However, she simply couldn't act on her own behalf in any way—take a class, volunteer, maybe work part-time —which we'd thought were reasonable expectations. Finally, I had to ask her to leave. To this day, I have some regrets, but mostly realize my own limitations. It was all I could manage at the time.

Pat Ferrone
Needham, Massachusetts

Hello! I am just sitting down to read some of the articles in the October/November issue of the *Catholic Radical*. Usually I recycle it when I am done, but I think I will save this issue.

Two of the articles gave voice to beliefs I have held for a very long time that are extremely unpopular and which have led to some contentious discussions with family and friends or the vast silence of "crickets" when I voice them. Specifically, I am referring to the articles on hospitality and a radical response to things like 9/11.

When I hear politicians running a campaign based on building a wall between the US and Mexico, I want to scream. We are all citizens of this planet, and, frankly, I don't believe in quotas. Sure, I don't want the US to become a haven for people trying to escape the law for some reason, but escape poverty? Come on in! Escape persecution? Come on in. Escape drought, famine, lack of opportunity, war? Just because I happened to be born here does not given me exclusive rights to the bounty and freedoms that make our country what it is. Everyone is so terrified that their American lifestyle will be compromised by helping others that they are not willing to extend the smallest crumb. Sure, I know not everyone thinks this way, but we can't deny that millions of people around the world suffer due to our selfishness and lack of humanity. If I am honest, I know that I could do more. I have a lovely home and enjoy a wonderful life. Over the years, our guest quarters have been home to friends and strangers—sometimes for extended months and years, but usually within my own "comfort" zone. Truth be told, I have walked a mile, but probably not "two," and that is something I continually wrestle with. What is distressing is knowing that if everyone in America did something concrete (hand-wringing can only do so much), everyone would be lifted up.

The other article spoke to something I have talked about only rarely—praying for terrorists. I have never heard anyone ask a terrorist what they want or need. No one is born a terrorist—it is motivated by something…fear, want, need. They hate for a reason, and if that reason were to be addressed, perhaps we could move forward. I am not a political expert, and I realize this is a simplistic solution; but I like to believe they are people with a heart and soul as well. With conflicting cultural perspectives there are other issues that are not as easily dealt with, such as the persecution and degradation of women, but surely bombing a village full of women and children or a hospital does not say, "Treat your women and daughters with more respect."

Thank you for making me feel not so isolated. These views are very unpopular, practically "un-American." I love this country, but I love humanity more.

Melissa Mercon Smith
Hopedale, Massachusetts

Catholic Worker Calendar

December 9 January 13 & 27 — Mass or Evening Prayer: Come join us in prayer, song, and Taizé chanting at 7 P.M. 52 Mason Street. Followed by refreshments.

December 20 — Christmas Caroling: Please join us for our annual visit to a nursing home and our neighbors. Mulled cider and Christmas cookies to follow. Gather at 5:30 P.M. 52 Mason Street.

To Be Announced — Another Night with Dan Burke: Don't miss the return performance of one of Worcester's most talented musicians. Be prepared to sing as well. 7 P.M. 52 Mason Street. Followed by refreshments.

Mason Street Musings

After agreeing to join Claire for a six-mile run, I found my enthusiasm waning. At scarcely three miles, I asked her, "Don't you think we've gone far enough?" and suggested, "Why don't we just walk home? We can hold hands and talk like normal couples." Without slowing her pace at all, Claire said, "Get thee behind me, Satan," and we ended up running almost seven miles.

On a different day, Claire was pretty discouraged about life here at the Saints Francis & Thérèse Catholic Worker. I offered some platitude like, "The fact that you continue when it's not appealing is sanctifying." She looked at me like I had just burped.

We ended up in a conversation about how can one be sure about God, during which I told her that, while most people rely on extensive prayer, study, or meditation to deepen their personal relationship with God, I feel like God hovers over me and makes His/Her presence known without my assent. She asked what I meant, and I couldn't think of a ready example until several days later, when I pontificated to an earnest intern named Matt from Holy Cross College about proper knife safety while cutting vegetables, only to cut my own finger in the process.

Saint Theresa of Avila had lofty, mystical experiences of God while my spirituality is more low brow, a combination of the miraculous and the humorous. Like Jonah, I go off on many tangents, and a very personal and very patient God uses big gestures to call me back. It's kind of a spirituality for stupid people. Having seen so many miracles here at the Catholic Worker, I would have to be a complete idiot not to believe in God.

Fritz Eichenberg

Perhaps that is one of the reasons, I love Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Epiphany. All four are joyful days that make the end of October until the beginning of January wonderful. From the broad smile on my two-year-old granddaughter Scotti May's face when she points to a pumpkin and says, "That's Halloween!" to the many laughs with family on Thanksgiving and Christmas, to the feast of giving gifts to the Christ Child, hope is poured down in such abundance that neither heartless pretenders to the White House nor the masters of war can diminish it. By the crisp, clear, early days of January, most of us have made resolutions to be better people in the new year.

Of course, I understand that promises are hard to keep. One of our guests only lasted three days before she relapsed on heroin. Even Saint Paul bemoans, "Why do I do the thing that I would not do?"

But there is an antidote, or at least an aid on the journey. Community. The love, censure, and support of friends, coworkers, and family can keep our hands on the plow. Without Claire's resolve on that run, I might have begun a slow slide into portly complacency, ill health, and sloth. Without the cut on my finger, our intern might still be suffering a know-it-all approach from me. Without your prayers and financial support, there'd be no lights, heat, or food to share here at 52 Mason Street. Without this house, vulnerable people would not have dignity in a place they call home. We are dependent on each other and the Other who is at once a child, parent, friend, and savior. I wouldn't have it any other way.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving, the merriest Christmas, and most blessed New Year! Ω **Scott**

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